



Journal of Management

Print ISSN: 0120-4645 / E-ISSN: 2256-5078 / Short name: cuad.adm.

Pages: 152-165 / Vol: 36 / Issue: 68 / Sep. - Dec. 2020

Faculty of Administration Sciences / Universidad del Valle / Cali - Colombia

Foresight studies and their assessment in the public policy of two Chilean regional development strategies

La prospectiva y su valoración en la política pública de dos estrategias regionales de desarrollo chilenas

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Article of Scientific and Technological Research

Submitted: 22/05/2020

Reviewed: 30/06/2020

Accepted: 19/10/2020

Thematic lines: Public Policy

JEL classification: R5

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25100/cdea.v36i68.9807>

Abstract

Foresight analysis has been widely recommended as input for public policies in recent years; however, in Latin America, studies regarding its benefits, difficulties, and effects have been scarcely investigated. In this context, and given the importance of public policies and the search for their quality, the objective of this work is to know the assessment of the foresight or future studies as a tool for public policies of two Chilean Regional Development Strategies, from the perspective of public officials and technicians who led the development of scenarios, strategic planning, and their execution. This qualitative research showed that a Foresight study is perceived mainly as a technical-academic instrument capable of uniting, generating new ideas, and legitimizing collective visions, associated with its better contributions at the beginning of the public policy cycle. Although this recognition is transversal in the interviewees, the analysis also showed that the execution in the long term does not manage to deactivate the recurring tension among political management, the political climate, and the problems associated with both the centralist leadership and the capacities installed in the local area, among other findings.

Keywords: Foresight studies, Public policy, Regional development strategies, Chile.

Resumen

El análisis prospectivo ha sido ampliamente recomendado como insumo para las políticas públicas en los últimos años; sin embargo, en Latinoamérica los estudios referentes a sus bondades, dificultades y efectos, han sido escasamente investigados. En este contexto, y dada la importancia que revisten las políticas públicas y la búsqueda de su calidad, el objetivo de este trabajo es conocer la valoración de la Prospectiva o estudios de futuro como herramienta para las políticas públicas de dos Estrategias Regionales de Desarrollo chilenas, desde la perspectiva de funcionarios públicos y técnicos, quienes lideraron la elaboración de escenarios, la planificación estratégica y su ejecución. La investigación, de carácter cualitativo, mostró entre sus resultados que la Prospectiva es percibida principalmente como un instrumento técnico-académico capaz de cohesionar, generar nuevas ideas y legitimar visiones de carácter colectivo, asociándose

sus mayores contribuciones en los inicios del ciclo de las políticas públicas. Si bien este reconocimiento es transversal en los entrevistados, también se hace presente en el análisis que la ejecución en el largo plazo no logra desactivar la tensión recurrente entre la gestión política, la coyuntura y los problemas asociados a la directiva centralista y las capacidades instaladas en lo local, entre otros hallazgos.

Palabras clave: Prospectiva, Política pública, Estrategia regional de desarrollo, Chile.

1. Introduction

The *new public management* was firstly introduced in the eighties by European countries with the aim of flexibilizing and reorganizing public management in general, yet also offering greater political control and better results. The *new public management* paradigm has thus been incorporated in various countries to a greater or lesser extent in the search of a higher modernization of the State. (Aucoin and Heintzman, 2000; Aucoin, 2010; Cejudo, 2013).

Strategic planning is one of the tools in the new public management that has reached wider dissemination alongside future or foresight studies, which are also the most used ones in Latin America in the last decade. Public policy design has included these two elements in order to count with clear objectives, high level of participation, anticipation and consensus, therefore reaching a more robust and structured design of public policies. (Mattar and Perrotti, 2014; Da Costa, Warnke, Cagnin, and Scapolo, 2008; Solem, 2011; Fuerth, 2013; Rijkens-Klomp and Van Der Duin 2014; Hilbert, Miles, and Othmer, 2009). This view is in line with Lahera (2004), especially considering the characteristics that a good public policy must possess.

Researchers and international organisms (Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (Cepal), 2013; Instituto Latinoamericano y del Caribe de Planificación Económica y Social (Ilpes), 2016; 2018; Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo (PNUD, 2017; World Economic Forum (WEF), 2018)) constantly recommend to include future or foresight studies in the creation of public policies, which naturally increase the interest in them. It also encourages governments, at the local,

regional, and national level, to integrate this tool as an input to plan their policies.

Foresight studies allow to systematize the reflexion and the subjective knowledge in relation to the future. This creates images and scenarios with an anticipatory character or future expectations with the aim of legitimizing and supporting the decision taking process. Future studies imply a wide variety of alternative futures and have no intention of predicting them. Their natural area is possible and preferred, so that they can be understood, explored, mapped, and created (Slaughter, 1998).

“Strategic foresight can be defined as a deliberate attempt to broaden the “boundaries of perception” [...] and to expand the awareness of emerging issues and situations” (Habegger, 2010, p. 50), allowing the cognitive construction of the future in the present (Voros, 200, cited in Petit and Brunet, 2017). The product of collaborative intelligence that this analysis usually triggers counts with the presence or absence of group interactions (González and Váttimo, 2012). It is also taken, processed, and analyzed under different qualitative, quantitative, or mixed techniques (Popper, 2011).

Given the previous information, it is possible to distinguish elements with hierarchies and reflections in relation to the evolution of a system, their possible disruptions, tendencies, and expectations.

In the nineties, the strategic foresight was positioned by French Michel Godet and has widely been disseminated in Latin America (Medina and Ortegón, 2006). There are thus a number of prospective studies in Latin America (Aceituno, 2015). However, research on their effect are scarce: one of them, for example, was the technical evaluation of the *Colombian Technology Foresight Programme*, (Popper, Georghiou, Keenan, and Miles, 2010), which focused on:

The efficiency of the (1) foresight process (e.g. methodology, expert engagement, organizational structure, management procedures, financial contribution) and the efficiency of the (2) foresight outputs (e.g.: the products and services, tangibles and intangibles, which result from the foresight exercise) (Poteralska and Sacio-Szymanska, 2014 p. 3).

Another more recent study was carried out by Shuff and González (2018), which included the relation between foresight studies and the elaboration procedures of public policies. This situation simultaneously revealed tensions among middle management, the foresight teams, the decision making groups, and the weaknesses manifested in relation to the informal channels where working relations take place, the organization of traditional scientific work or normal science, and the disciplinary fields involved.

In Latin America, the debate on this discipline has been mostly limited to the publication of books, showing a limited presence in peer-reviewed journals. During the last four decades, the most common themes in books are the following: dissemination of national foresight, regional ones, technology, history, and theoretical and technical aspects focused on future design (Merello, 1973; Mendoza, 1980; MacLauchlan and Acosta, 1988; Corona, 1989; Acuña and Kwonow (1990); Sabag, 1990, 1999; Mojica, 1991, 2005; Medina, 1998; Baena, 2004; 2005; Miklos and Tello, 2011; Gándara and Osorio, 2014; Aceituno, 2015, 2017; Mattar and Cuervo, 2016; Marí, 2018).

In this context, the objective of this work is to assess foresight studies as a tool for public policy in two Chilean Regional development strategies, from the perspective of public and technical workers.

This objective results from two gaps in this field. The first one was to move towards the empirical analysis of foresight studies in Latin American public policy. The second one is to elucidate the contribution of future studies in public policy (Johnston, 2012; Van Der Steen and Van Twist, 2013; Rijkens-Klomp and Van Der Duin, 2014; Van Dorsser, Walker, Taneja, and Marchau, 2018; Shuff and González, 2018). In order to accomplish these objectives, this is a qualitative research study based on interviews with technicians, professionals and planning directors of two Chilean Regional Governments. They equally participated in the phase of elaboration of prospective scenarios and in the design and execution of the Regional Development Strategy (RDS). This is a public policy instrument that serves as a base to characterize the past, present and future

of a region in Chile and works as a guiding principle in its development.

The main research question in this study is: What is the assessment of a foresight study for a RDS, from the perspective of technicians, external consultants and professionals from a Planning Division and Regional Development of a Chilean Regional Government?

This article is divided into an introduction, that contains the general background, the theoretical framework, the methodology used, results, and conclusions.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Development of foresight studies in Chile

Chilean foresight studies are dependent on the central government. They were introduced as a consequence of the *planning theory* and some new paradigms in public management. In Chile, it is possible to find planning initiatives from the mid fifties, mainly coming from Production Development Corporation (CORFO) (full name in Spanish: Corporación de Fomento de la Producción de Chile), Agriculture Ministry, and the National Planning Department (Odeplan) (Aceituno, 2015). Odeplan, in the end of the nineties, became the Ministry of Planning and Cooperation (Mideplan), whose predominant role is the elaboration of foresight studies and the training of workers and academics through the import of knowledge carried out by French specialists in the decade of the 2000s.

In this context, Soms (2010) mentions 3 identifiable lines of foresight in Chile: firstly, between 1974 and 1984, foresight was used in the very same center of administration of the State and under the wing of the National Committee of Administrative Reform. This meant to possibly use it as an opening analysis in the beginning of economic globalization. Secondly, between 1987 and 1990, it was carried out through a project funded by The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) sponsored by Funturo, based on Universidad de Chile and sponsored by Odeplan. Lastly, foresight was possible

through a presidential initiative called *Chile Futuro*, with an eminently geopolitical focus and method.

Soms identified this improvement in the introduction to foresight studies. Others should also be mentioned, such as the one from "Department of Research and Foresight of the Presidential advisory board" (1980-1986), that under the wing of The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Iquique Professional Institute, some activities were made, such as: "First Seminar on Research Methodologies for Foresight studies and its application the Decision Taking process", resulting in the first text related to Foresight in our country. This was called "Metodología de la Investigación Prospectiva Aplicada a la Toma de Decisiones" or "Methodology of Foresight Methodology applied in the decision taking process" in English (1982).

In the same decade, the initiative called *Futuro* (1987-1990) arised. This organization was made by workers from Odeplan, The Foreign Office Ministry, and some academics from Universidad de Chile. It was funded by UNDP for at least five years. Among other research, *Métodos y técnicas de investigación prospectiva para la toma de decisiones* (Foresight methods and research techniques for the decision making process, in English) (1990) was published. In addition, *Perfiles y tendencias de la cuenca del pacífico: una visión desde Chile* (Profiles and tendencies from the Pacific basin: a view from Chile, in English) (1990) was also published, which was the first foresight Delphi exercise.

Another state activity, called *Chile Innova* (2001-2006) was associated with the program of technology development and innovation from the Ministry of Economy. This was sponsored by BID, whose aim was to strengthen the business opportunities with a time horizon towards the year 2010, which allowed the rise and execution of the project called *Perspectiva Chile 2010*.

In terms of territorial development, in the last decades, Chile has delved into the elaboration of studies in the long term through Regional Development Strategies, which use different tools to provide information and construct their plans. Once their techniques have been revised, foresight

studies have been identified in the following regions: Araucanía Region (2010-2022); Rios Region (2009-2019); Coquimbo Region (2008-2020), and Los Lagos Region (2009-2020). All of them will soon accomplish each of their time horizons. In addition, the regional government of Aysén encouraged the program *Transferencia para el Ordenamiento Territorial de Aysén* (Transference for the Territorial Organization of Aysén, in English) in the year 2000, through a process of territorial organization executed by the Regional Ministry Secretary of the Planning and Coordination (Serplac) in conjunction with diverse public services and Agencia de Cooperación Técnica Alemana (GTZ) or German Agency for Technical Cooperation, in English. The latter also acted as a technical part in the construction of the RDS in Los Lagos.

Other foresight studies in the country are the following: The construction of foresight scenarios for Huilliches communities in Chiloé (2001), carried out by Austral University and Mideplan. At the commune level, only Pudahuel, located in the Metropolitan Region, conducted a foresight study with a time horizon towards the year 2045 in 2011. Their aim was to guide the regulation plan and the District Development plan (Pladeco). According to the current regulations, this should be updated at least every four years. This is very significant, since Chile has 346 communes.

In this regard, the Ministry of Energy initiated a planning process in the long term under backcasting methodological schemes in 2014. This allowed to create a route for the Chilean energy policy towards 2050. Likewise, the Agricultural and food area has also received contributions regarding foresight studies. For example, *Fundación para la Innovación Agraria* (Foundation for Agrarian Innovation, FIA for its Spanish acronym), depends on the Ministry of Agriculture, whose studies were initially funded by BID. Up to date, these include: agri-food, forestry and rural Chile towards 2030. Second scenario: *Cálida Tierra* (Warm Ground, in English) (2010); *Plan de Acción Chile* (Action Plan Chile) 2030. *Sistema de Innovación* (Innovation System) (2011); *Chile Una Visión* (Chile One Vision) 2030. *Una Visión de la Innovación Agraria en Chile* (A vision of

Agrarian innovation in Chile), towards 2030 (2011); La Fruticultura Chilena (Chilean Fruit growing) towards 2030. Principales desafíos tecnológicos para mejorar la competitividad (Main technological challenges to improve competitiveness) (2015); Estudio prospectivo: Industria de la carne bovina y ovina chilena al 2030: principales desafíos tecnológicos para mejorar su competitividad (Foresight Study: Chilean bovine and ovine meat industry towards 2030: main challenges to improve competitiveness, in English) (2018).

The above can be summarized in the following Table 1.

Table 1. Chronology of Foresight studies in Chile	
Institution	Years running
ODEPLAN-MIDEPLAN	1974-2009
Department of Research and Foresight of the Presidential Advisory Board	1980-1986
FUNTURO	1987 - 1990
Ministry of Economy	2001 - 2006
Regional and Administrative Development Sub-Secretary (Subdere)	2009 - 2010
Ministry of Energy	2015
Foundation for Agrarian Innovation (FIA)	2010-2018
Source: Adapted from Aceituno, 2015.	

Finally, the Chilean Foresight and strategy council (CChPE, for its acronym in Spanish) was founded in 2014. This is a non profit institution that nationally joins specialists in foresight studies, strategies, and future studies from the public and private areas. And, more recently (2019), this also includes The Center for Future Studies from Universidad de Santiago de Chile (Usach).

From this summary, we should also mention the Latin American and Caribbean Institute of Economic and Social Planning (Ilpes, for its acronym in Spanish) dependent on Cepal. This has had an important role in the dissemination, training and elaboration of documents regarding foresight studies, which maintains a bibliographical platform that reveals its impact on this matter.

2.2. Regional Development Strategy (RDS)

The creation of Regional Governments (GORE) and the gradual decentralization of the government functions (Law number 19.097, from 1991; Law number 19.175, from 1992, modified in 2005) led to consider planning as an important area for the development of regions.

Between 2007 and 2008, the planning functions carried out by the Regional Secretary of Planning and Coordination (Serplac) were trespassed from Mideplan to GORE, which allowed the creation of Planning Divisions in their internal organization. RDS were initially developed by Mideplan through Serplac, which were understood as “a long term social project, which is also wide and plural. It expresses the regional objectives and priorities regarding their public and private initiatives necessary to reach those objectives” (Soms, s.f, p.4). This task was afterwards taken by the Regional and Administrative Development Sub-secretary (Subdere).

To date, at least three RDS generations have been performed. Some aspects such as planning have been added to strategy elements and in some of them, foresight analysis. These strategies are annually updated with time horizons with an average of ten years.

3. Methodology

This is a qualitative study. The ideas and reflections presented in this study were obtained through an analysis of documents and interviews with public workers of two Divisions of Planning and Regional Development of the Chilean Government (GORE) and expert consultants.

The sample was made of six key informants, selected given the logic of criterion and intention of the researcher considering the objectives of the study.

- Professional from the Planning Division GORE1.
- Professional from the Planning Division GORE2.

- Former head of the Planning Division GORE1.
- Former head of a Planning Division GORE2
- Consultant/Technician1.
- Consultant/Technician2.

Data was collected through semi structured individual interviews. They were conducted between april 2019 and december 2019. Open questions were applied to experts after they had signed a written informed consent. These were conducted in Spanish and the versions here presented are translated versions of their answers. The selection was based on the close relationship of the experts with the theme of study, the role carried out in the regional governments, and the technician, monitoring and familiarity guidance within the whole process.

Interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed through a codification logic and saturation of the studied dimensions. For that purpose, six traditional functions of foresight studies in public policy, proposed by Da Costa *et al.* (2008) were used. These dimensions have been widely referenced in research that related future studies with public policy (Cuhls, Beyer-Kutzner, Ganz, and Warnke, 2009; Havas, Schartinger, and Weber, 2010; Schaper-Rinkel, 2013; Petit and Brunet, 2017). The dimensions are the following ones:

- To create new ideas.
- To facilitate the implementation.
- To integrate participation.
- To support the definition of policies as a result of a collective process.
- To reconfigure the system of policies so they can be approached in the long term.
- To have a symbolic function, based on a rational focus.

4. Results

Building the RDS and applying the foresight itself follows an outsourcing logic. This is carried out through consulting and external consultancy for the GORE in charge

of the process, whose results are based on the Planning Division of each of these state institutions.

4.1. Saturated dimensions according to Da Costa *et al.* (2008):

a) To inform the policy. To create new ideas

Da Costa *et al.* (2008) points out that the main function of foresight analysis is the contribution to the design of public policies. This is done through new ideas and anticipated knowledge, which may show risks and opportunities, yet also possible options: "The aim is to improve the knowledge base for thinking about and designing policy" (p.373).

The RDS outsourcing is complemented with a participative exercise at all levels. It is also conceived as a fundamental instance of the instrument.

The interviewees perceive foresight as a tool that encourages ideas, despite the fact that some of them might present truisms. The highly participative discussion facilitates, according to the interviewees, the development of future alternative scenarios, with which road maps towards desired futures were created. In addition, they also allow the anticipation of problems related to the territory and the rationale of possible threats as a new factor to be considered.

(The Foresight Methodology) "...I believe that it definitely contributes because it gives a literal and academic support to common sense (...) this allows to obtain data that might not be measurable or tinged, it gives very clear guidance regarding the weaknesses, flaws, and available potential"
Regional Expert

"I think it is pertinent to confirm my conviction that foresight tools are the right ones for both building scenarios and also to develop public policies, keeping determined practices. This is possible because it allows to discriminate relevant information for the future evolution of territory yet also for the methodological tools it possesses, which focus the analysis on the relevant and structural variables that condition the future evolution"
Technician/Expert

However, they also made things invisible, that, through time, developed as tendencies or important and unavoidable changes. These are related to global and technological transformations that had an impact on the local area and were not adequately well-considered.

b) The implementation

Da Costa *et al.* (2008) indicate that one of the characteristics from foresight studies is that it works as “a systemic policy instrument through the process of the exercise itself” (p. 373), creating links beforehand nonexistent or opposite between participants and organizations, which improves the system organization and therefore, facilitates implementation. The following are main aspects mentioned by the interviewees with respect to the implementation:

b.1) Aspects regarding context. Macro regional level. National Global

RDSs do not consider macro tendencies entirely. Herein, the region and the RDS are framed within. This is relevant because the participants evidence the strong persistence of centralist tendencies in the country. These ones ultimately restrict the real possibilities of RDS implementations. The participants point out that decisions from important ministries, for example, have priority over decisions that emerge from an RDS, even when this is coherent with a foresight analysis carried out at the local level. In this sense, there is a discontinuity between the central government and the territorial breakage that GORE, through RDS, must execute.

“Undoubtedly, all RDSs possess a deficit in their institutional framework. In my opinion, this is due to the analysis focused on regional themes only, but there is no analysis of the likely evolution of the country, which only contains baseline estimations (...) Then, a big part of the emphasis on public action is given by central direction, which limits the action for regional decisions”
Regional Expert

b.2) Indicative and non normative character of RDS

According to the previous information, there is an important tension: there is a general strategy oriented to the future, while

daily action by GORE is mainly focused on brief governmental situations where there is also a need to respond to the present time in the short term. In addition, RDS is a planning instrument that has a context at a superior organic level, since it establishes orientations by the central government, and at the inferior level with the district development planning (Pladecos), while each of them has indicative and non normative characters. For this reason, there is not preeminence or continuity, since it is not binding. This definitely hinders the strategy accomplishment.

“...that also helps to reevaluate these kinds of instruments that arise in a certain time and have a certain lifespan. It is important to incorporate action plans because RDSs are not a plan in themselves; the RDSs only provide guidelines. As they are only that, they have to be detached from development planning or specific programs. So, it is in here that there is a lack of professionals that constantly re-evaluate these plans and correct what is supposed to be corrected every two years, etc.” Regional expert

b.3) Institutional aspects and political dynamics

Academic and intellectual foresight supports the RDS, made in expert language in an abstract logic. Explicitly, it does not present a mechanics that proves a certain institutionality and regional political dynamics, with their own times and guidelines. In this sense, the main implementation problems arise when political authorities intend to apply their own management and agenda, without the proper support to carry out an already existent strategy, but quite the opposite. In fact, they are encouraged to apply their own agenda, yet that only promotes their distinctive mark in it, which may or may not match the strategy.

“...unfortunately, the regional development strategies until today translate into non-binding tools for the political authorities. The most frustrating thing for me is that every time there is a change of government, there is a new governor who declares that everything before them has no value so they are going to start a new strategy, trying to play down this strategy (...) this selfishness and the political stance of our leaders undermine this, which goes beyond political contingency” Regional expert

b.4) Availability of an indicator for RDSs

The interviewees agree that there is difficulty to generate and reach a consensus regarding indicators that have strategic value to effectively monitor and measure the efficacy of RDSs. Beyond the available state statistics, there is a need for systematic information to do quantitative or on-of evaluations, yet this should also include empirical background in order to assess the practicality of the strategy. In other words, it is necessary to specify their results and effective impact, most of which are qualitative in nature, thus more difficult to construct.

“There were no indicators, there is only an analysis of the invested amounts in all dimensions but no, there are no indicators at all. However, as you know, the best available indicators for public investment are CASEN studies and the census, so we are still lacking some things...”
Regional expert.

b.5) Human capital to carry out RDS

Foresight is treated as an element that is external from the technical teams of GORE, yet there is consensus in the need to count with highly specialized human capital. This should guide and lead in order to articulate and effectively carry out the strategy. The interviewees claim that GORE is not always able to count with resources, or at least, not in the volume that the practicability of the RDS requires.

“To transfer new powers to the regional government, and those are the two more important steps that I foresee. Essentially, in the new tasks transference, powers to administrate resources for regional governments with the required qualifications. That is to say, this all should include a strong encouragement for training the human resources, whether it is about the workers that exist today in regional governments or the new generations that have been incorporated because there is actually no qualified human resources. So this all fails and as the saying goes, we will cross the bridge when we come to it...”
Regional expert

c) Participative Feature

In this regard, Da Costa *et al.* (2008) indicate that the traditional way to frame

public policy has been strongly questioned. In order to improve their legitimacy and transparency, civil society must be included, since that encourages governance and the policy acceptance.

RDS is known as an instance where the central government's intentionality (for example: Subdere or The Ministry for Social Development and Family) meet other communities and GORE.

In the past decades, the central government supported the work of consultants in the foresight area, who usually have an academic and intellectual approach. These consultants symbolically process the data obtained from participatory processes, so that later on, they offer these inputs as components for discussion. They especially use it for communal validation of different settings and the delimitation of likely futures, such as the desirable scenario or move.

In this instance, technicians and consultants fulfill the role of intermediaries with the different community members. Some of the workers of the regional government are also members that must encourage the participatory process, especially in the different services and the regional ministry offices, which is both time and resource consuming for its final execution.

Although with variations regarding the reach and the more or less deep character of the public call, the participative element is really important for the interviewees. The reason is that it is perceived as a factor that facilitates the existence of a procedural legitimacy of the RDS experience and product in general. Equally, they always recognize that this is partial and not necessarily binding. Therefore, the governance is not seen as a direct consequence. Legitimacy, however, allows a degree of stability through time, and some members, for example entrepreneurs, see the strategy as a difficulty to develop business.

(...) It was understood that the regional strategy is a guiding, indicative instrument, you know? That it did not have a normative power that forced its usage. Therefore, the gamble was that if there was more participation, it was going to allow the validity in order to be recognized as

a planning instrument, which despite not being binding, it has and still is a binding instrument for taking decisions” Regional expert

d) Support for the definition of policies

Occasionally, it is difficult to transform the result of collective processes into political definitions. This is due, among other things, to the politicians agenda, their hidden interests and the underestimation of the participants in relation to the generation of policies. In this case, the foresight function should behave as a facilitator of options for the definition of policies, which must be carried out in conjunction with the policy makers. “Therefore, ‘supporting policy definition’ or ‘strategic counselling’ has to be considered explicitly as an additional function” (Da Costa *et al.*, 2008, p. 375).

Long term plans for RDS emerged from the cohesion of foresight studies, which triggered different policies and action plans. These consider a typical set of fields according to the policies logic and public investment such as structure, public work, environment, education, among others.

In this context, RDS and the different scenarios set out the bases for a powerful vision that convenes energies, purposes and willingness for a political guidance in the activities by the regional government, private institutions and, in general, the development of the area regardless its weaknesses and the loss of potential in particular political moments and lack of agenda definition. In any case, adopting the foresight is a good practice for the definition of policies.

“There are public investment programs and most of them have to relate to the regional development strategy and naturally, specific plans, since there is a strong connection there. For example, in the private sphere, all those investment projects that have an environmental impact or require an environmental impact statement, are forced to consult our instruments inside the instruments that they are also forced to consult in the regional development strategy. Therefore, the private entity that would like to invest in the region has to properly analyze the instruments and say that they are not going to affect the instrument itself but they are

going to contribute to their development. As you see, in some way there are different sources that force the institutions, the local political authorities and the citizens themselves, to act as members of key development that have some way to consult more than once the regional development strategy and therefore closely relate with each other. In most cases, how can I explain this? A budget you need from the Ministry of Finance has to have a justification why you are asking for it and for what purpose, and the justification usually comes from instruments like this one” Regional expert

Policy generation was highly recognized by the interviewees. However, one of the RDS found a further difficulty given the scattering of the objectives. This meant that new policies (almost 20 new sectoral policies) were created with the aim of deepening each of the planned areas. This was perceived as a permanent process of redefinition of policies. An aspect that stands out in this regard is that there seems to be no logic for operative priorities for the strategy. Instead, it gets determined when joining different lines of action.

“I am talking now about the policies, when I tell you that their implementation comes from the strategy, that is what I am talking about. All this has taken a long time and has been quite complex, excessively complex. Therefore, time goes out of hands and in between there are national policies and other priorities. For example, earthquakes, storms, anything like that, and everyone has to be lined up for that...” Expert/Technician

e) Reconfiguration of the policy system

To reconfigure the policy system means to look at the foresight perspective as a mediator of policies and not as an end for itself. This results in a system that is more accurate to face long term challenges, supporting flexibility and adaptive learning to new contexts and challenges. This is possible because it reveals various tensions of political, administrative or department nature. (Da Costa *et al.*, 2008).

RDS presents a vision, yet it must also recognize -according to the interviewees- that the established and recommended actions are weakened on the way instead of transformed in defined strategic

encouragements. Governments end up ignoring these cases by handling them with situation management and actions in the short term only. It is worth noticing that they clearly identify the necessity to solve issues at present, but at the same time, there is no adequate alignment among the strategic components, tactical actions, and the operations of the regional governments, their programs and state services in the area, each of which have their own logic and resources.

“I believe what I just told you, because honestly, let’s see if we can see it in perspective. We had the regional strategy, which is the biggest umbrella, and then we have all the policies focused on the project. We hindered the process of implementing the policies. This was the filter, where I think we did not do as well as we would have liked to, because on the way we realized it was difficult to do it to everyone’s taste. I will give you a very simple example: in the tourism policy, which was the first one to find the highest potential area for tourism development, which were already 2, the area of X, area Y, and coastal area Z. When we go with this proposal to the council, they say that all communes have to have something, even those who have no tourism future, but all of them are considered tourist areas. So here all the effort is lost, so you can’t reach any impact because the point of policies, theoretically speaking, is to solve defined problems. Here, however, the problem was widened towards the whole region, you know? So it was impossible to handle this and therefore it is here where I think there is a mistake that we hope we are able to correct now” Regional expert

There is certainty that there is an inherent contradiction between the long term goal established by RDS with the political goal, temporal horizon, and the personal objective in the medium and long term of those who lead the GORE. The centralist administration, at the same time, forces the local interest and the availability of resources, which is another repeatedly mentioned element.

f) Symbolic function. Rationality signal

“under certain political conditions foresight also performs a symbolic function. By launching a foresight exercise policymakers may wish to signal to the public that their decision making is based on rational information” (Da Costa *et al.*, 2008, p. 375).

This assertion is not free of criticism. It is true that there is a possibility that there are hidden interests by those who want to impose and justify a policy in particular, yet foresight does contribute to public policy, since it offers a symbolic function based on founded information.

A highly appreciated aspect by the interviewees is that RDS uses foresight, which allows a formal consolidation over the area and prompts participative discussions with members of the community. They recognize its partial or even incomplete feature, but they also value the fact it is strong and formal, despite receiving criticism by the civil society and the private sector. However, the legitimacy reached by social and political consensus is an attribute that supports and offers a framework to justify decisions.

“Yes, the RDS represents an instrument of high value that is technically validated because the document that University X provided is a study, a huge book where the foresight study by university X is much more than the strategy in terms of information and documents. So, this really worked for us: when we went to the consultant council and we saw all the different members we told them, here is the study carried out by a serious organism, by university X, here is the background. We gave them copies and said that we based our ideas on that. These people were all very satisfied and impressed, because I also think that they did not know about the existence of foresight, so from then on I always dare to say always” Regional expert

5. Conclusions

In general, we can conclude that the interviewees recognize the advantages and offer a value to the foresight study, especially in terms of the genesis of public policies. Other valued features are the legitimacy of the process, the wide and uniting information. These features are repeatedly and spontaneously mentioned in most of the cases. There is special reference to the new ideas that arise from collective participation, since that is where there is formal and sustained information for the creation of a common scenario among the diverse members involved. These opinions shed light on the generation of plans and

programs, which clearly aligns with some ideas mentioned by Da Costa *et al.* (2008).

The absence of binding policies, the force of some global transformations that have a local impact, the political climate, the diversion triggered by personal agendas given the authority turnover, centralism, lack of resources of advanced human capital and the difficulty to generate indicators that monitor the progress of RDSs are problems that impede a good performance of the policy. These issues actually occur despite initial agreements where the action lines are subjected to public investment and their execution is also regulated by RDSs.

In this context, and following the already presented information, we can see in Table 2 the functions proposed by Da Costa *et al.* (2008) in a more abstract way.

Table 2. Six main functions of Foresight in public policies and their assessment	
Functions of Foresight	Perception of the Foresight within RDS
To inform the policy. To create new ideas	High importance
The implementation.	Low importance
Participative feature	High importance
Support for the definition of policies.	High importance
Reconfiguration of the policy system.	Very low importance
Symbolic function	High importance
Source: adapted from Da Costa <i>et al.</i> , 2008.	

Therefore, GORE should count with specialized technicians in the discipline in the short term. The objective is to bring these elements together since the latter is considered to have a purely academic approach, so that it can be related with GORE own logic of daily work. This would translate into an increased closeness among foresight, social actors, those who take decisions, and the indicators, allowing the appropriation of results to become a current issue, which simultaneously encourages effective reconfiguration of the policy system.

In addition, it is necessary to create a central and regional institutional culture. This would coordinate these policies, playing an active role in the implementation stage. Creating an institutional system or a foresight-based system is one of the tasks that must be worked on in the medium term.

Finally, it is also pertinent to encourage the logic of development and the consolidation of foresight within the public policy. This can be done through an analysis of its effects in the different stages of the cycle of public policy in order to introduce improvements. This is a pending challenge for the academic community.

In the legal framework that guides the RDS, the lack of a binding relation must be taken into account as an important condition beyond public investment and other instruments that are related to RDS and reinforce it. In the academic approach, this might hinder the analysis itself, resulting in misrepresentations in the findings.

6. Conflict of interest

The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

7. Funding

The author received no specific funding for this study.

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How to cite this paper?

Aceituno Olivares, P. (2020). Foresight studies and their assessment in the public policy of two Chilean regional development strategies. *Cuadernos de Administración*, 36(68), 152-165. <https://doi.org/10.25100/cdea.v36i68.9807>

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